■ APPENDIX XIII

COPS Problem-Based Learning/ Police Training Officer Program

Frequently Asked Questions

COPS PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING (PBL)/ POLICE TRAINING OFFICER (PTO) PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Why create a new training program?

There are three main reasons why it became necessary to develop an updated training model for trainees:

First, the method used today to evaluate trainees is drawn from approaches trainers developed more than 30 years ago. The present system evolved during a time when problem-oriented policing and community-based policing were not yet part of the police repertoire. Policing has changed a great deal over the past 25 years and, as a result, training systems must change to keep pace. This imbalance between current capabilities and what policing needs, led to the development of this new training program for trainees.

Second, most present systems for post-academy training came about because of the need to minimize the agency's liability regarding police behavior. While liability will always be an issue, it should not drive the training function to the point that it has. Also, today's post-academy training models tend to try to make up for poor hiring/selection processes. This causes the training process to become a documentation-laden effort that sometimes overshadows the training of new officers.

Unfortunately, time has shown these methods did not automatically reduce an agency's liability nor do they guarantee a smooth termination process. The complexity of current policing, combined with the introduction of COPPS, has greatly increased the difficulty of properly training officers. Practitioners nationwide have argued for a new training method to correct this situation.

Third, a training model must be flexible enough that trainers can adapt it to their local conditions. This model has that degree of flexibility. Ultimately, however you define "real police work," one common denominator exists: all officers deal with neighborhood problems in some manner or another. Unlike other training systems, the PBL model has the flexibility to ensure that our newest officers get the training to do effective problem-solving with regard to their own strengths and weaknesses.

How is the problem-based model any different?

During the research for this new model, agencies across the country indicated they use a wide variety of training methods for trainees. Most utilize simple daily checklists to evaluate the trainee's performance. Daily checklists that emphasize

"passing and failing" scores simply do not help adults learn. They also serve to consume a significant portion of the trainer's valuable time.

The problem-based method in the PTO program is significantly different. Solving problems resides at the center of the problem-based learning model. The program incorporates all the regular duties of policing, but they are put into the context of the problem-solving process.

In the other models, the checklists made it easy to evaluate trainees.

Checklists are easier. But do they truly reflect how new officers will respond to complex situations? Do checklists really help new officers learn? Education research tells us they don't. In this program, evaluation still occurs, but it takes many forms. It takes place informally every day, formally each week, and during two evaluation phases by an independent evaluator. The trainee must also solve a number of "real life" scenarios. The benefit lies in the fact that the evaluations become a part of the learning process. In the PTO program, the trainee is more responsible for his or her learning throughout the learning and evaluation experience. The trainer spends less time evaluating and more time training the recruit to do the job safely and competently in the first place.

How are trainee issues identified and documented?

Evaluations still occur and, if necessary, recommendations may include remedial training. But rather than a unilateral approach from the top down, a partnership exists between the trainer and the trainee. Both are responsible for the evaluation of the trainee. In the PTO model, the evaluation process becomes part of the learning activities of the new officer. The model provides a higher quality evaluation of the trainee and takes a different form from the traditional 1 to 7 grading scale that currently exists in most jurisdictions. Once trainers are familiar with the system, the PTO forms become less time-consuming and a more powerful and effective indicator of trainee performance.

The training systems used now are okay. If they're not broken, why fix them?

The traditional FTO program does not meet the needs of COPPS and value-driven policing. Education research has improved greatly over the previous few decades. We now know a great deal more about how adults learn in the most effective way. Police agencies need to take advantage of these improvements. This PBL philosophy imbedded within the PTO program incorporates long overdue strategies for training new officers.

This is just touchy-feely stuff that ignores real police work.

If real police work is catching offenders, handing out speeding tickets, and breaking up bar fights, the PTO method will teach officers to do those things. If real police work is dealing with gangs, helping victims, and going to court, the PTO method will do that, too. No matter how "real police work" is defined, this new training method will help trainees learn how to do all those activities in the most effective way possible. The key difference with this model lies in the fact that trainees will learn these skills in a problem-solving model using "real life" police examples. That approach represents the best way to learn about policing in our communities.

How does the PTO model work?

The trainers assign "street" problems to trainees and have them learn about policing in the context of solving those problems. The trainees work through responses with the help of their police training officers. The model uses a number of new tools to do this, including the *learning matrix* and the *PBLEs* (problem based learning exercises). This is a new system of training and, like any new system, it will take time for general acceptance. The primary responsibility of police training officers lies in helping trainees learn the job of policing and problem-solving in the safest, most effective and efficient manner. The PBL philosophy facilitates the process.

What's in a name?

This model uses the abbreviation *PTO*. The research and instructional team, including current police trainers and supervisors, decided to move away from the language of earlier training models including the usage of the military phrase "field training." This change of language reflects the movement towards community-based, problem-oriented policing. Some sheriff's departments who do not call themselves "police officers" have decided to use the term "Training Officer" program. Whatever the designation, it is important that the name reflect the philosophy of value-driven policing and COPPS.

Other terms used in the PTO program *LAPs* (Learning Activity Packages), *Coaching and Training Reports,* and *NPEs* (Neighborhood Portfolio Exercises) are found in the glossary at the end of Appendix XIV.